

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE

Chairman

Subcommittee on Research and Science Education

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE



**BRIAN BAIRD**  
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES  
3<sup>RD</sup> DISTRICT, WASHINGTON

**Washington Office:**  
2443 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, D.C. 20515  
(202) 225-3536

**Vancouver Office:**  
General O.O. Howard House  
750 Anderson Street, Suite B  
Vancouver, WA 98661  
(360) 695-6292

**Olympia Office:**  
120 Union Avenue SE, Suite 105  
Olympia, WA 98501  
(360) 352-9768

WEBSITE: <http://www.house.gov/baird>

December 10, 2008

The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne  
Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to call for cancellation of the upcoming December 19 oil and gas lease sales on pristine wilderness-quality public land and near national parks in Utah. I understand that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has agreed to defer the lease sales of some of the most controversial parcels of land. While I applaud these actions, they are not sufficient. For this reason I ask that you withdraw the lease sale for all parcels of land in close proximity to national parks and on lands previously identified as having wilderness characteristics.

America's National Park System represents one of our nation's great contributions to the world and a sacred promise to future generations. Utah is home to some of the most unique and iconic landscapes of the Park System, from the breathtaking mesas carved over centuries into the Canyonlands to the ancient petroglyphic art that lines the walls of Nine Mile Canyon. It is here that Colorado River, the lifeline of the west, runs alongside the unsurpassed rock formations of Arches National Park and Moab on its journey to the Grand Canyon, and where John Wesley Powell gave Desolation Canyon its name as he set out on his historic expedition through the mountain west.

These scenic landscapes and iconic landmarks that define America's vast natural splendor may be auctioned away permanently should the Administration go forward with its last minute lease sale proposal. The federal government is entrusted by the public with the stewardship of our nation's natural resources, and I am concerned that the BLM's planned lease sale betrays this trust by jeopardizing national parks, historic lands and pristine wilderness in Utah. The upcoming lease sale has not been adequately studied nor has serious consultation with appropriate parties been conducted. It has not been sufficiently determined that oil and gas extraction on these parcels will not cause irreparable harm to some of our nation's most cherished natural treasures.

A primary area of my concern is with the BLM's recently released resource management plans (RMPs) that govern the management of 11 million acres of land in Utah, 5 million of which had been previously inventoried by the BLM as being eligible for protection as Wilderness. In formulating the new RMPs, the Administration has run roughshod over its duty to preserve wilderness-quality lands. The BLM has done an about-face in its determination that these lands may now be exploited for short sighted and uncertain industrial prospects. It is vital that these RMPs are revisited and that these lands are protected.

I am also gravely concerned that the National Park Service was not initially consulted with regard to the proposed lease sales near national parks, as has been customary for some time. Only after protests were raised was the Park Service given the opportunity to analyze the parcels under a severely truncated schedule. While the compromise that was eventually reached represents a modest improvement over the prior proposal, the removal of only one-third of the opposed parcels is not satisfactory. The long term, permanent damage that oil and gas extraction may cause to nearby national parks, including to air and water quality, is far too serious for this proposal to be rushed through without the proper scrutiny afforded to previous lease sales.

The rush to allow oil and gas drilling on pristine wilderness quality land and near national parks and historic landmarks is in direct contravention to the federal government's obligation to protect such lands. The concerns raised by the National Park Service, as well as by members of Congress and the public, have not been adequately addressed and so I strenuously object to the December 19th lease sale.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brian Baird", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brian Baird  
Member of Congress